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doubt the *first* Röntgen picture was produced on February 22, 1890, in the physical lecture room of the University of Pennsylvania.

ARTHUR W. GOODSPEED.

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

#### CURRENT NOTES ON PHYSIOGRAPHY.

##### CATSKILL AND HELDERBERG ESCARPMENTS.

RECENT reports of the New York State Geologist contain chapters by N. H. Darton, from which a number of interesting physiographic paragraphs may be selected; and inasmuch as there is no good account of the geography of the Empire State, all these piecemeal contributions toward it are welcome. The Helderberg escarpment in Albany county rises boldly over the broad alluvial plain formed by the Mohawk during the 'Champlain' submergence. Back of the escarpment the land rises in successive rock terraces of moderate height. The Catskill escarpment in Ulster county is the strongest feature of the kind in the eastern part of our country. Subordinate characteristics of this dominant form are found in the capture of the headwaters of certain consequent upland streams by the obsequent Kaaterskill and Plaaterskill, which are gnawing deep 'cloves' in the steep face of the escarpment and thus gaining drainage area for the subsequent Hudson valley. Among the ridges in the foreground the complicated monocline of Medina sandstone forming Shawangunk mountain is the most conspicuous. A number of geographical illustrations accompany these reports, but their reproduction is disappointing in several cases.

##### EXPLORATION IN LOWER CALIFORNIA.

AN account of a collecting expedition to Lower California by G. Eisen (Proc. Cal. Acad. Sci., V., 1895, 733-775), gives some notes of interest on the features of the extremity of the peninsula. Winter rains are light and rare; late summer rains are fre-

quent and come in comparatively heavy showers; the withered shrubby growth on the mountain slopes bursts into leaf and flower when the rains begin. Very brief mention is made of raised beaches and of 'moraines,' which are described as prominent, large and steep, especially on the east slope of the mountains, where they 'all run more or less parallel from west to east' (754). The mountains, being only 7,000 or 8,000 feet high, and their eastern slope being drier than the western, it seems questionable whether these so-called moraines are authentic records of glacial action. Possibly they are dissected alluvial fans, which have not infrequently been mistaken for glacial deposits.

##### NIUAFOU, A VOLCANIC RING ISLAND.

LIEUT. SOMERVILLE, of the British navy, contributes an account of this remarkably perfect ring island to the London Geographical Journal for January. It lies midway between the Fiji and Samoa groups, remote from other islands. Its outer diameter is about three miles, the whole coast line consisting of forbidding black lava rocks. The caldera is about two miles in diameter, with interior cliffs of 200 or 300 feet in height. On the eastern side of the deep lake here contained is a peninsula formed by the craters of the eruption of 1886. The view from the commanding summits of the caldera ring is described as of remarkable beauty, including a great expanse of the surrounding ocean rolling under the southeast trade, the calm lake within the basin, the luxuriant vegetation on the older slopes, and the barren cinder cones of the recent outburst. A good sketch map and two views are reproduced.

##### THE FÆROES.

AN account of the Færoes, or Sheep Islands, is presented to the same journal by Karl Grossmann, as the result of visits

made in three recent summers. The islands result from the deep dissection and submergence of a great volcanic mass, whose nearly level lava beds determine the tables and cliffs which dominate the scenery. The exposed coasts are cut back into great sea cliffs, some of which rise 1,500 to 2,400 above the sea, exposing magnificent structural sections. Huge outstanding stacks remain in front of many cliffs.

The outer islands are reached only in fair weather and then with difficulty; their small population often being storm bound for weeks at a time. Sea birds, nestling on the cliffs, constitute an important article of food supply; the 'bird rocks' forming valuable property for the parishes to which they belong. Here the hardy custom of bird catching, while dangling from a rope let down from the cliff top, is still in practice. 'Tidal whirlpools' occur in the inner fiords; some have a diameter of thirty yards; their smooth surface, bordered by a rippling cascade, standing half a foot above the surrounding water.

#### MOUNTAIN WASTE IN RELATION TO LIFE AND MAN.

AMONG the *Anthropogeographische Beiträge*, edited by Ratzel (Wiss. Veröffentlichungen, Ver. f. Erdk., Leipzig, ii, 1895), is an essay by Bargmann on the forms assumed by the youngest waste building talus slopes and fans on the flanks of the northern Kalkalpen, in their relations to mountains, snow, water, plants and mankind. Various forms assumed by the waste are minutely classified. The already large area covered by waste slopes is shown to be increasing, while the naked rock area is decreasing; thus the opportunity for occupation of the mountain district by various forms of life is on the whole improving. Yet in the present phase of degradation, the modern invasion of meadows by the advancing foot of waste slopes has in a number of cases seriously

reduced the value of the valley floors as pasture grounds. Some slopes of loose waste descend at angles of 44 and 46 degrees. The chapter on the manner in which waste slopes are taken possession of by plants is an excellent illustration of the relation of physiography to botany. W. M. DAVIS.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

#### CURRENT NOTES ON ANTHROPOLOGY.

##### WAS SYPHILIS A GIFT FROM THE AMERICAN RACE?

No doubt there is a racial nosology as well as physiology. Many writers have asserted that syphilis originated in America and was first introduced into Europe by the sailors of Columbus. Dr. Joseph Jones claims to have unearthed bones showing syphilitic caries from the ancient graves of Tennessee. In the *Journal of Cutaneous Diseases*, October, 1895, Dr. A. S. Ashmead argues that syphilis was autochthonous among the Aymaras of Bolivia, and quotes Forbes as to the possible origin of it from the alpaca, an animal which suffers from it in a malignant form. Dr. E. Seler, in the *Verhandlungen* of the Berlin Anthropological Society for 1895, has a learned article to support the view that it was prevalent in Mexico before the conquest.

On the other hand, in the same volume, (p. 454), Prof. Virchow declares he never saw a syphilitic bone from an ancient American grave; that the disease was known in Europe certainly as early as 1472, and was prevalent in Japan in the ninth century.

#### ETHNOLOGY, GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY.

THE relations of these three sciences are discussed by T. H. Achelis in the *Globus* 1896, No. 4. He regards ethnology as a strictly empirical study, 'wholly without metaphysical tendencies.' Its ultimate aim is to define the human soul by a thorough collation of all that it has actually achieved,